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Schoolscapes
The Newsletter

The Challenge of Guidance

By Eve Krakow

Robert Bisaillon, assistant deputy minister for preschool, elementary and secondary education, opened the second day of the training session for resource persons, held in Quebec City on March 28-29, 2002, with some thoughts on the meaning of guidance.

Bisaillon began by announcing that the new Minister of Education, Sylvain Simard is in favour of continuing the reform without any interruption between elementary and secondary school. "Within the next month, the Minister will inform the public of how he intends to proceed with the reform at the secondary level, in all its aspects. But one thing is certain: the first step in the implementation of the reform in secondary school will be taken next year."

This is why the commitment of resource persons in their schools and school boards is particularly important, he continued. "I would like to insist on the deeper meaning of a word that comes up repeatedly: guidance. To guide someone does not mean to dictate things, nor to stuff someone with information, nor to do things in his or her place. Guidance means letting the other person maintain his or her personality, values and responsibilities. Guidance means working with the other person.

"Obviously, it is better—especially in the area of education—to be a step ahead of the person we are guiding." Otherwise, the other person has nothing to gain from us, he explained. "If our personality and values on a pedagogical level do not represent an added value for the people we are accompanying, then we become interchangeable. This is why these training session are so important for what will later happen in your own schools."

This is particularly true in the area of evaluation, he said, noting that analogies can be made between the guidance of resource people in their schools, and the guidance of students. "In both cases, we have to go beyond the mechanical sequential approach, i.e. a time for teaching, a time for learning and a time for evaluating—as it was when we went to school and as we were trained. To guide a student means to tell him, 'Let's observe together what you do, how you do it, what you've learned.' This is the natural movement of education, but not necessarily the common practice."

Bisaillon deplores the fact that despite widespread sentiment that there are major problems with the current education system, people are still vividly afraid of change. "Schools need to reflect on the fact that, for the last 20 years, there has been a significant minority of students who have not budged in their educational performance and behaviour, who do not have any interest in school, who are simply waiting for the moment to leave—and to whom we continue to offer the same menu as we do to everyone else. We have to ask ourselves if the meaning of school might not be found in another way of learning, evaluating and teaching."

cont. on page 2

2007-02878/

Cont. from page 1

During a recent visit to a secondary school where project-based learning was already being put into practice, Bisaillon met students who were thrilled with this new way of learning. One student commented that, finally, he was being asked to do research on things he didn't already know. "The students said to me, 'We have discovered a self-confidence we didn't know we had; for the first time, we are being given the time to learn.' That's the best self-evaluation there can be."

There is almost no limit to what students can produce when they are asked to do so, he said. "Guidance implies putting people into production mode, and that is what we are trying to do at these sessions: we are asking you to produce, reflect, and act on an intellectual level, rather than handing you ready-made content. Of course, that does not prevent you from asking questions—and it does not exempt us (the MEQ) from answering them," he added.

Roundtable on Evaluation: Some Answers, Many Questions

By Eve Krakow

To answer questions arising out of the previous day's workshops, it was decided that the second day of the training session should begin with a roundtable discussion, led by Lise Ouellet, coordinator of the French, language of instruction program. She was accompanied by Leila Valin, assistant director of evaluation at the Direction de la formation générale des jeunes (DFGJ); Maurice Plante, principal of École Bon-Séjour in Saint-Pie-de-Bagot; and Johanne Munn, from the Société GRICS.

At the end of the first day of the training session, workshop groups had been asked to submit specific questions they wished to have addressed. The workshop leaders and round table panelists then examined and discussed the questions, attempting to group them into themes. "There seemed to be three underlying concerns," said Ouellet. "Why should we change, how do we go about it, and what means can we adopt to succeed?" Three topics were chosen for the roundtable: competency level scales, the end-of-cycle progress report, and implementation of the reform in secondary school

Competency Level Scales

What are they?

Competency level scales—formerly called descriptive scales—are tools to support teachers in both evaluating learning and applying the Québec Education Program, explained Laila Valin. There is a competency level scale for each subject-specific and cross-curricular competency, for each cycle of elementary school. Each scale contains several stages, or levels of competency, that represent important steps in the development of the competency in a student. For all scales, the description of the last stage or level of competency of the cycle corresponds exactly to the end-of-cycle outcome as described in the QEP.

Why do we need them?

The scales stem from the competency-based approach and the heightened importance of the teacher's professional judgment in the QEP. "The competency level scales help us move outside the logic of the learning-teaching-evaluation sequence, where we use summative evaluation (a sum of results), to move into a logic of exercising one's professional judgment, where the teacher situates the student according to his or her level of development of the competency."

Competency level scales are not measuring instruments; they are not checklists. Rather, they are used to interpret the information gathered. "Based on the data collected using various instruments and in various contexts, the teacher uses the scale to situate the student along the continuum of the competency's development," said Valin. In this way the scales serve to detect where a student is falling behind or having difficulty, enabling teachers to adjust their teaching strategies accordingly.

The scales can also be used to communicate information to parents at key moments (although it would not be realistic to include all the competencies in a report card, Valin noted). They are used at the end of the cycle to communicate information to teachers of the next cycle, providing a student portrait. In the case of a student having difficulty, for example, the scale can be used to ensure that appropriate support measures continue to be provided.

How were they developed? Have they been validated?

Each competency level scale is the result of a rigorous development process, said Valin. They were developed by teams of teachers and education consultants, with the guidance of MEQ professionals and subject-area specialists. Prescribed criteria included coherence with the QEP, clarity, and the observable nature of the stages.

An initial validation was carried out by submitting the scales to university professionals with expertise in the development of descriptive scales and in the subjects themselves. A second validation was then carried out within the educational community: teachers and education consultants who had not been part of the development process of either the scales or the QEP were asked whether the scales were clear, realistic, and usable in the classroom. Adjustments were then made based on their comments.

How are they to be used?

Johanne Munn, who works with resource teams in the school network, said it is important to help teachers understand where the competency level scales fit within the evaluation process as a whole. "Competency-based evaluation is a new concept for elementary and secondary teachers in Québec. We therefore have to find-

Cont. on page 3

ways to help teachers become familiar and comfortable with this concept."

For many educators, the concept may appear very abstract; for this reason, it is important to develop training activities that allow teachers to work in concrete terms. For example, she said, pick a few specific competencies and their corresponding scales, and ask teachers to bring in some of their students' work, exercise books or portfolios. Then, have them situate those students within the levels of competency.

"This exercise can have several effects," said Munn. For instance, it may show that teachers do not have enough information to make a judgment. "We have developed considerable expertise in evaluating final products, but we have less experience in evaluating or looking at a student's procedure and strategies." This may lead to reflection on how to obtain such data. It may also prompt educators to go back and take a closer look at the QEP. Finally, it may lead to discussions on how to help students move from one level to another.

"In the workshops or training activities you develop in your schools, it is important to start with teachers' materials," Munn emphasized. "You will also have to make choices, because if you want to guide teachers without discouraging them, you can't do everything at once." Begin with those teachers you think are ready, she suggested, and focus on just one or two subjects.

Maurice Plante added that, in his experience, the participation of the school administration is essential. "My teachers are very happy to have me organize training sessions with education consultants, but they're even happier when I participate." He therefore intends to be present at such activities so as to be able to better guide his teachers afterward. He also intends to allow teachers to make mistakes, and give them time to experience successes.

When will they be ready?

The competency level scales should be ready by the end of April. However, Valin noted that, at the request of the school organizations (school boards and private schools), the scales will not be sent directly to the schools, but will be sent to the school boards. "They want to make sure that teachers and schools are ready to use them." The policy on the evaluation of learning should be ready by June.

End-of-cycle progress report

What purpose does it serve?

Maurice Plante compared the end-of-cycle progress report to a set of instructions that follows each student into the next cycle.

"The end-of-cycle progress report will allow us to establish a profile for each child, to identify each child's problems and needs, for both subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies," he said. It will help in organizing class groups, and enable teachers of the next cycle to continue the support or enrichment measures for each child, or simply, to monitor the child's learning development.

Preparing such a progress report is not easy, but it is necessary to ensure the continuity and coherency of learning, he explained. "We have to learn to work as a team and to be responsible, as a team, for student learning and progress."

Requirements and responsibilities

Laila Valin explained that while there is no legal requirement to produce an end-of-cycle progress report, it can be considered as a pedagogical obligation. "If we want to be consistent with the QEP, it's important that teachers take stock of where the student is at in his or her learning, and that they communicate this information to the students, their parents, and the teachers of the following cycle," she said.

The *Guide for the Evaluation of Learning at the Preschool and Elementary Levels* (although still a working document) provides some guidelines and suggestions as to what the end-of-cycle progress report should contain, but stipulates that such decisions are ultimately the school's responsibility. "However, it is the teachers of the cycle team that are in the best position to determine the content and format," said Valin.

Content and format

Johanne Munn noted that it is important to separate the evaluation process leading to the end-of-cycle progress report from the communication tools that will be used share the results obtained. "As with the report card, one must work with these two perspectives in mind."

As well, because schools are still implementing the QEP, Munn suggests working gradually, that is, not necessarily including everything right away. Schools can decide to focus on a few subjects or competencies in the progress report, and bring in the rest later.

She offered some questions that schools should consider when planning the progress report. For example, can the competency level scales be used to prepare the progress report? Might they be the thread tying everything together?

Also, at what point should teachers take stock of where students are at? "It might be useful to explore the idea of having teachers situate their students in March or April, to obtain a class picture. "They will probably be surprised to see that a good proportion of children already meet or exceed the expectations of the competency," said Munn. Teachers can then use the end of the school year to confirm their judgment. For children who meet the expectations only partially or who are having

Cont. on page 4

difficulty, the teacher can look for additional information to better identify their level of competency and ways to help them, so as to be able to communicate this information to teachers of the next cycle.

"The progress report not only situates a student, is also used to redefine his or her needs. In this way it continues to be a support for learning, helping us to identify both how to help students in difficulty, and how to maintain the motivation of other students, so that they continue to progress."

Communication tools

Communication tools should be developed according to the target audience, said Munn. "You might provide an overall picture to parents, and a more detailed version to teachers." Schools might want to complete the progress report with other elements, such as a portfolio or a file of pertinent student work. The means of student participation also need to be determined. "Not everything is pertinent," Munn warned. "It's important to take the time to discuss the content and methods and to ensure that they are consistent with what goes on in the classroom."

Secondary School

Do we need to wait for all orientations to be finalized?

The resounding answer: No! "Several aspects of the reform are firmly implanted and are here to stay," said Valin. These include the competency-based approach, cycle-based organization, the use of competency level scales, the end-of-cycle progress report, the priority given to formative evaluation, the integration of evaluation into the learning process, and the increased importance of teachers' professional judgment.

What about certification of studies?

The MEQ has put together a draft policy for the certification of studies based on the principles of the reform and taking into account pedagogical, administrative and political aspects of certification, Valin said. Various departments within the ministry were involved to ensure that the proposal is in line with the requirements of all sectors, and discussions are currently underway with the educational community. "We also intend to broaden the consultation to include other stakeholders, such as parents and universities," said Valin.

How can secondary schools prepare for the reform?

To begin with, "It's important not to skip the stage of gaining staff commitment," said Johanne Munn. If people are not convinced of the pertinence of the change, they won't come on board.

The commitment stage is usually preceded by a one of disequilibrium, where current practices are called into question. Secondary schools therefore need to engage in discussions on various issues, to allow people to rethink their values, beliefs and perceptions. Munn suggested some questions to serve as triggers for discussion:

- If we truly want evaluation to enable us to help students and adjust our teaching strategies, is it pertinent to prepare our exams in advance?
- Why are teachers who spend hours and hours correcting student assignments and giving feedback disappointed when, once the work is handed back, they see that most students do not read their comments?
- Why do students who are handed back assignments covered in red ink, with every little mistake pointed out, not feel like reinvesting themselves in their work?
- Why do we give a student a test when we know in advance that he or she will fail?

Once this state of disequilibrium has been achieved, there are several avenues to explore, said Munn.

- Do teachers clearly understand the concept of learning underlying the competencies presented in the QEP?
- Once we understand that to develop these competencies, students must be placed in situations where they can act and show initiative, then how do we create these opportunities in the classroom? How much time should we devote to this kind of problem-solving?
- How does this change classroom management? Are secondary teachers used to working with a cooperative approach?
- How much do teachers know about different cognitive and metacognitive strategies? Have they received training on these strategies?
- How can we get students to participate in the evaluation of their learning? How can we get them to evaluate themselves?
- Competency-based evaluation brings out the importance of in-class observation techniques. Do teachers need to refresh their knowledge in this area?

These are just some of the many different spheres to explore with teachers to help them prepare for the reform in secondary school.

Why should we start now?

Maurice Plante responded to this question with a question of his own. "If you are not convinced that something needs to be done in secondary school, just imagine for a moment the kind of 12-year-old that will be delivered to secondary school in a few years." These young people will have been taught to use their critical thinking and to be creative in finding solutions to problems; they will have developed effective work methods, be used to cooperating with others to learn, and be able to communicate appropriately to discuss ideas or to present demands. "Are we ready to receive them in the current pedagogical

Sharing Experiences of Guidance in Evaluation

By Wendy Mill

Vanguard School's experience

After the plenary meeting, a final workshop gave participants a chance to share experiences in providing guidance for assessment or evaluation. Much of the workshop consisted of a presentation by Judy Shenker of Vanguard School, a private educational institution that serves students with learning disabilities.

At Vanguard School, efforts to develop assessment practices that support literacy learning began in 1999 and continued until 2001. A second process, which explores ways to bring students to assess their own writing, is still under way. Two groups of teachers were involved; six from Elementary 1 to 3, and eight from Elementary 4 to 6. The guides began with the conviction that professional development is a process, not an event, and with the desire to shift expertise from the guides to the school. Although not all the teachers found the approach recommended by the guides convincing, they cooperated because they began to see that it worked with their students. Changes in their beliefs and motivation tended to follow changes in their practices, rather than preceding them.

Helping teachers see quality in terms of criteria

At first, the teachers' assessments of the students' writing provided very little feedback and emphasized mechanical aspects rather than content. Using a rubric, the guides helped the teachers to define their current practices and become aware of goals concerning evaluation practices that were consistent with the reform. They also taught them how to recognize the elements of a story. The teachers began breaking down the marks they assigned into categories (content, originality, vocabulary, mechanics, presentation). This gave the students some feedback, but not enough, and they still had no input into the marking process.

In the next step, the guides developed a detailed rubric for evaluating writing. It was useful as an example, but, in keeping with the aim of shifting expertise to the school, the teachers had to produce their own rubric. The guides worked with the teachers to develop a rubric for marking students based on their teaching practices. The teachers articulated what they valued (criteria for assessment), decided on the number of performance levels to define and defined each level, tested the rubric with the students, and discussed and adjusted it. The teachers' rubric had four performance levels, defined in terms of criteria grouped under the broad headings Text Structure, Audience, Ideas and Content, and Mechanics.

Including students in the evaluation process

From 2000 to 2001, the guidance process moved on to include students in evaluation. This meant developing scoring rubrics to guide student learning and self-evaluation. As they had done in developing their own rubrics, the teachers had to begin by defining their objectives (to improve students' knowledge of writing content, their knowledge and use of the writing process, their metacognitive knowledge, their knowledge of why writing is good or bad, their efficiency and their attitudes), and then criteria, and had to share these with the students. This time they also had to provide models. The teachers developed a checklist for students to use in assessing their writing process. The students were still not partners, however, in developing the assessment process. To help them grasp what that involved, the teachers created a rubric with them, based on criteria for evaluating cookies. This rubric, part of which is shown below, served as a model.

TASTE

EXCELLENT 3	GOOD 2	POOR 1
• makes you want to eat more	• makes you want to eat some more	• makes you not want to eat any more
• the darker the chocolate the better	• medium chocolate	• light chocolate
• chocolaty taste	• some chocolaty taste	• artificial chocolate taste

With this model and teachers' help, the students eventually developed their own rubric for writing. The criteria and levels regarding the setting of the story are reproduced below. >

SETTING

The setting tells the reader where and when the story took place.

1	2	3	4
• I forgot to tell my reader the time and/or place of my story. • There are no words that help my reader imagine where and when my story takes place.	• I told my reader either the time or the place of my story. • The reader has a hard time imagining the time and the place of my story because I did not describe my setting clearly. • If the setting in my story changes, I don't explain the changes clearly. This may confuse the reader.	• I made it really clear to my reader where AND when my story takes place. • The reader can easily imagine the time and the place of my story because I describe both clearly with some detail. • If the setting in my story changes, I explain the changes and give my reader some details about each setting. • I often include information about the setting which is not really necessary. It makes it hard for the reader to focus on the important parts of the story.	• I made it really clear to my reader where AND when my story takes place. • The reader can easily imagine the time and place of my story because I use many interesting words and details to describe them. • If the setting in my story changes, I explain the changes and give my reader many details about each setting. • Most if the details I include about the setting are necessary. It makes it easier for the reader to focus on the important parts of the story. • My setting does more than just explain the "where" and "when." It adds to the different elements of the narrative. I have good reasons for choosing the setting that I did.

Other voices

Another participant said she has followed a similar approach at the English-Montréal School Board, asking teachers what criteria they use to define a good book and whether they think the same criteria could be used to assess students' writing. The teachers were initially very marks-oriented; they did not see quality in terms of criteria. To familiarize them with the idea of evaluation criteria, the guide suggested they compare three student texts, using comments rather than marks. Eventually, the teachers developed rubrics (which this guide called exemplars) and then worked with their students to establish their criteria for evaluating books and writing.

Participants stressed the importance of ensuring the principal's support for any changes in evaluation practices. Indeed, Shenker said that the experiences at Vanguard School were most successful when the principal sat in on them and learned along with the teachers.

One guide expressed frustration with teachers' tendency to want guides to provide recipes they can apply immediately, instead of investing their own time in research and experimentation. Another guide had encountered this attitude, but said that in a small group of teachers, where dialogue is possible, she had been able to get around it by having the teachers establish their priorities, and on that basis, develop a plan. Once teachers have a plan, it is clearer what sort of information they need, and the guide encourages them to seek (most of) it themselves.

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